

**Supporting People with Disabilities to Achieve Healthier Lifestyles**

***Issue***

Among people with cognitive disabilities and other developmental disabilities, overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for secondary health problems and premature death. Although the disability and health field has emerged over the past decade, resources to implement higher-quality health promotion and strategies to prevent secondary conditions are lacking in most states.

***Intervention***

The South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs Prevention and Wellness Committee used grant funding from Eat Smart, Move More SC to provide four (4) wellness seminars to help move the SCDDSN provider network, which consists of thirty-nine (39) public Disabilities and Special Needs boards and additional private providers, towards a focus on healthy lifestyles for the people with disabilities being served in their communities.

- The Prevention and Wellness Committee assembled and provided orientation to a coalition of ninety-five (95) liaisons representing most areas of the state. The primary purpose for assembling this coalition was to encourage, advance, and guide local efforts to promote healthy lifestyles for people with disabilities by focusing on nutrition, weight and stress management, and physical activity.
- *Promoting and Supporting Wellness* seminars (total of 4) were offered in each region of the state. Participants were given instruction on the medical complications of obesity, good nutrition, the importance of physical activity, stress management, and strategies for overcoming obstacles. A nutritionist with experience in the disabilities field was selected to conduct training. Use of evidence-based wellness curriculums specific to people with disabilities such as *Steps to Your Health* was encouraged. A total of ninety-one (91) staff were trained. Attendees were staff from residential services, day services, nursing, rehabilitation supports, and activity coordination.
- The SCDDSN provider network was surveyed at the end of the grant cycle to determine what wellness/healthy lifestyle opportunities were available to people served by their agency and what policies and practices were in place that promote healthy lifestyles. The survey also asked if the agency had a committee that focused on consumer wellness, what the barriers are to promoting wellness, and how people are assessed for their interest in attaining a healthier lifestyle. Additional comments, suggestions, and/or concerns were also solicited.

***Impact***

- Pre- and post-testing results of seminar participants significantly indicated that learning occurred.
- Dialogue by some participants during seminars indicated there was an interest in promoting consumer wellness at the local level.
- Seven (7) providers developed additional wellness opportunities for consumers in 2008 and nine (9) providers added wellness programs in 2009.
- Five (5) providers applied for grants in 2009 and a few are fundraising to promote wellness.
- Three (3) providers established a wellness committee in 2008 or 2009.
- Four (4) providers enacted a wellness policy in 2008 or 2009.
- Two (2) agencies contacted SCDDSN for consultation in order to start a wellness program.
- Fifteen (15) providers participated in *Steps to Your Health* during the grant cycle.

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